

Week Ending Friday, January 24, 1997

Proclamation 6967—Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday, 1997

January 17, 1997

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

People throughout the world celebrate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as a tribute to his shining example of love and justice.

Dr. King was a man of clear and powerful vision who offered an uncompromising message of brotherhood and hope at a time when violence and racial intolerance tore at the seams of our Nation. In addressing these ills, he often referred to what he called the “magnificent words” of the Declaration of Independence, which proclaimed that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” He declared these words to be “a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir,” and upon which payment could no longer be delayed. Dr. King’s struggle made it possible for all of us to move closer to the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence and in our Constitution.

Although ours is the most successful multi-racial, multicultural society in human history, in the words of Dr. King, “our work is not yet done.” We have not yet fully realized Dr. King’s dream of a Nation of full opportunity, genuine equality, and consistent fair play for all.

Every citizen must rise to meet that challenge because America’s promise of freedom and opportunity cannot truly be realized for any of us until it is realized for every one of us. We all have an obligation to reach out to one another—across the artificial barriers of race, gender, religion, class, and age—so

that each member of our society shares fully in the promise of the American Dream.

In the spring of 1963, Dr. King was arrested in Birmingham, Alabama, while protesting discrimination in public accommodations and employment. From his jail cell, he wrote of his faith that ultimately what was good in America would prevail over fear and prejudice:

We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. . . . We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands.

As I begin my second term as the last President of the 20th century, I ask each American to work with me to usher in a new era of hope, reconciliation, and fellowship among all our people—rich and poor, young and old, and men and women of every race. I urge all Americans to put intolerance behind us, seek common ground, and strive for justice and community in our Nation.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim Monday, January 20, 1997, as the Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this occasion with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this seventeenth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-first.

William J. Clinton

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NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 18, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on January 23.

The President's Radio Address

January 18, 1997

Good morning. Today I want to talk with you about the progress we have made in response to last year's disturbing rash of arsons and other destructive acts directed at houses of worship throughout our country. But before I do, I want to condemn another act of violent terror, the recent bombing of the women's health center in Atlanta. That, too, is wrong, and we also must stop it.

Now, in the aftermath of these terrible crimes against the houses of worship, many of us ask ourselves, why? Were these fires fueled by a sudden upsurge in racial and religious hostility? Were they set for personal gain or revenge? Or were they merely random acts of violence? Whatever the causes of the crimes, they offended every citizen who cherishes America's proud heritage of religious and ethnic diversity, every citizen who remembers that religious freedom, justice, and equality are the founding principles of our great democracy.

As one who was raised in the church and who continues to be guided by the enduring lessons I learned there, I joined with all Americans of conscience in demanding swift action to combat these crimes, to help the churches rebuild and to prevent anymore fires.

Seven months ago, I established the National Church Arson Task Force to coordinate the efforts of more than 200 FBI and ATF agents deployed to work with local and State law enforcement agencies, churches, and citizens to catch and prosecute those responsible for these crimes. This week, the task force released its first interim report. The report shows that we have been remarkably successful in solving the crimes. Since January 1995, 143 suspects have been arrested in connection with 107 fires at churches and other houses of worship. This rate of

arrest is double the general rate of arrest for arsons, and three-quarters of these arrests occurred during the 7 months following the formation of the task force. So far, 48 defendants have been convicted on Federal and State charges in connection with 43 fires.

This work has been supported by \$3 million in Justice Department grants to help local communities intensify their enforcement and surveillance efforts. In addition, Congress authorized the Department of Housing to administer a \$10 million loan guarantee to assist with the rebuilding of churches. And the Federal Emergency Management Agency continues to work with communities to increase awareness and help build local arson prevention coalitions. This Federal effort must continue until all those responsible are brought to justice and no more fires burn.

But even more impressive than our Government effort has been the tremendous outpouring of assistance that has flowed from every corner of our country in response to these crimes. People have crossed lines of faith and race and region to link arms in a united effort to rebuild and protect our houses of worship. And by doing so, they have shown us that America is still a country that cares about its neighbors, a country that comes together in the face of common threats to defend the common ground of our values. I am reminded of what Joseph said in Genesis when he met up with the brothers who sold him into slavery: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

I saw this up close this past August when Hillary and I, along with the Vice President and Tipper Gore, picked up paint brushes and hammers to help rebuild Salem Baptist Church in Fruitland, Tennessee. One of the earliest supporters of the rebuilding of this tiny black church was the congregation of a white church 3 miles down the road that also had suffered a suspicious fire.

On a national level, we saw groups like the National Council of Churches, the Anti-Defamation League, the Southern Christian Leadership Council, the National Association of Evangelicals, and the NAACP come together as one to tackle this problem. And we received strong bipartisan support from Congress for our work. The insurance indus-